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ABSTRACT

This report describes highlights of the first National Assessment of Literature, a project of the Education Commission of the States. This assessment surveyed four major questions: How well do people understand literature? What and how often do they read? In what ways and how well do people understand imaginative literature? How familiar are they with major characters and works of Western literature? The ages of the subjects tested were nine, thirteen, seventeen, and adults. Results were analyzed according to sex and region of the country. The report includes samples of the testing devices used for each of the four major questions, some of the responses received, and some of the generalizations derived from this survey. The authors note that each question did not receive equal assessment time, and that no one question could be exhaustively pursued in any one assessment year. They also note that the results may be interpreted in various ways depending on the reader's point of view. It is hoped that while the survey will not answer all or even many of the questions about the status of literary understanding in America, it will generate discussion and further research. (Author/DI)

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HIGHLIGHTS

of the first

National Assessment

of

LITERATURE

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ASSESSMENT
OF EDUCATIONAL
PROGRESS
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NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

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ERRATA SHEET

Page 3,line 27: Females consistently performed better than males

Page 8,lines 29, 30: should read " about half or more of the people expressed some involvement with the work and fewer than a third said things that would fall into the perception category."

INTRODUCTION

One of the exercises in the first literature assessment required 13-year-olds to respond to the following statement: "Literature is a school subject that is taught in many schools. Sometimes it is studied in English classes. It is important to study literature in school." The exercise provided five possible responses, ranging from strong agreement with the statement to strong disagreement. Then it asked the students to give a reason for whatever answer they selected.

English teachers who have worked with 13-year-olds may be dismayed but unsurprised to hear that fewer than half of them (43% in fact) strongly agreed with the statement. There is some encouragement in the fact that 34% "agreed somewhat," but that still leaves about one fourth of the 13-year-olds either undecided or in disagreement with the proposition that it is important to study literature in school. Moreover, when asked to give reasons for their agreement -- whether strong or conditional -- with the statement, about 70% of the children indicated that literature is only important for utilitarian reasons -- i.e., it improves grammar and speech; it might help someone to get a job; or, as one student put it succinctly, "We need literature to go to college." There were a few, of course, who said that literature increases awareness of other people's opinions, social problems, and history; one even wrote that "it allows you to 'live' other people's experiences." But by and large, even those 13-year-olds who expressed strong agreement with the statement did not justify their fervor very convincingly.

Though this is but one exercise and it suffers from the weakness of all survey questions -- that is, it invites a certain amount of insincerity -- it probably provides a fairly accurate sketch of seventh and eighth graders' attitudes toward literature. When we turn to the attitudes expressed by juniors and seniors, however, the results are substantially different.

When the same exercise was administered to 17-year-olds, 90% of them strongly agreed that it is important to teach literature in school, and 9% "agreed somewhat." Even allowing for the fact that 17-year-olds are more "testwise" than the 13-year-olds, these figures represent an impressive change in attitude.

Of this 99% who believe literature is important, 60% gave acceptable reasons for their agreement. A large proportion of their reasons were still utilitarian, but a great many more 17-year-olds than 13-year-olds (about 30% in all) cited literature's role in achieving self-understanding, expanding the sensibilities, and broadening one's tolerance of new and different ideas. A few even suggested that reading literature is fun.

This shift in attitude from age 13 to 17 may well indicate that high school English is a positive experience for most teenagers. But all studies of this sort can elicit two reactions: one can be pleased that most 17-year-olds acknowledge the importance of literature in the curriculum or disturbed that 40% are

unable to explain that importance. So it is, throughout the four volumes of literature assessment results: there is information here that may be from one point of view encouraging, from another, discouraging; from one angle, suggestive though incomplete, and from another, complete but unimportant to some people. Each reader will have to sift through the results and, according to his experience with students and convictions about research in this area, make his or her own judgment about the usefulness of the data. If some results contradict classroom experience, the Assessment hopes they will stimulate productive inquiry. If other results confirm what many people already suspected, then at least they furnish nationwide documentation of facts we could not safely generalize about before. The assessment will not answer all or even many of the questions people may have about the current status and general direction of literary understanding in America; but it does generate discussion, prompt research, and encourage the development of measurement tools that may better enable us to understand the needs and capabilities of our students. There will be future assessments to supplement this data; the next one is presently being developed with the assistance of professionals from all relevant areas of English and English education and it will be administered in three years.

This first literature assessment addressed itself to four major questions implicit in the 1965 Literature Objectives: (1) How well do people understand imaginative language? (2) In what ways and how well do people respond to works of literature? (3) How familiar are they with major characters and works of Western literature? And (4) What and how often do they read? Each question did not receive equal assessment time, and none, obviously, could be exhaustively pursued in any one assessment year. For instance, there are hundreds of ways to measure comprehension of imaginative language but we can employ only a few; consequently, the information pertaining to this critical skill is rather limited, and much remains to be done. Again, there is no reasonable way to gather comprehensive information about familiarity with Western literature without devoting years to the task. So the assessment probed for recognition of relatively few selected characters and works which might give us data about their relative familiarity to various subgroups of people. Each of the four questions above served as a theme around which the Assessment organized the results for reporting; all of the themes will be available in 1973. What follows is a brief outline of their contents.

CHAPTER I

THEME 1: UNDERSTANDING IMAGINATIVE LANGUAGE

There are five kinds of exercises in the first theme volume: "missing line" exercises, designed to assess rudimentary skill in following rhythm or logic (or both) in poetry; pun exercises, designed to determine ability to recognize puns in passages which may or may not contain puns; metaphor exercises, which assess recognition of the tenor and vehicle of specific metaphors in poems; "form similarity" exercises, requiring people to identify similar passages and choose the genre which best describes them; and "inference" exercises, requiring identification of the tone or mood of a passage and a written defense of answer.

There was, as one might expect, a steady increase in successful performance from age 9 to 13 to 17, followed by a slight drop in adult performance. In general, people at all four age levels did best on exercises requiring comprehension of metaphors and ability to follow the rhythm or logic of a poem. They did not do nearly as well on the inference exercises, which asked them to explain in writing why they made certain inferences, or on the form-similarity exercises.

At all age levels, certain subgroups of people usually had higher percentages of success than the entire population, and certain subgroups performed below the national level. Regionally, for instance, the Southeast was consistently below the national level of achievement and the Central region was consistently above it. At age 13, the Northeast was about even with the Central region, and at the adult level, the West joined it.

Males consistently performed better than females at the three lower age levels, but at the adult level there was little difference between them.

Blacks, as a group, always had lower percentages of success than the national percentage; Whites, as a group, consistently did better than the nation as a whole.

At all four ages, levels of parental education correlated highly with percentages of success: that is, as a group, people whose parents have had no high school education consistently performed less successfully than the nation did; those who had at least one parent with some high school training performed somewhat better but were often below the national percentage of success; those with at least one parent who graduated from high school usually did as well as the national population did; and those who had at least one parent with post high school education almost always achieved percentages of success significantly greater than the national figure.

The results according to size and type of community groups reveal that students who attend inner city schools do not do nearly as well as all students taken together, whereas students

attending urban schools which serve predominantly professional communities perform much better than the national population.

The performance of the various subgroups relative to each other and to the national performance is generally consistent throughout the four literature themes and even the eight volumes of our report on the Reading assessment. Clearly, some groups of people demonstrate a general reading disadvantage, not simply a disadvantage with respect to understanding imaginative language. For even on the most elementary reading tasks, those groups do not achieve percentages of success as high as the nation's; naturally, as tasks become more sophisticated their disadvantage becomes more obvious.

Because National Assessment gathers its information using easy, medium-difficulty, and hard exercises, one cannot readily make a judgment about overall national competence in critical reading skills on the basis of a national median or average percentage of success. There are no criteria against which to pit such a figure in order to determine whether it is high or low, a sign of educational success or an indication of failure. Once the Assessment has measured competence in an area a second time, however, there will be comparative data which would enable one to say, for instance, that competence in literary understanding is either increasing or on the wane. For the present, those who want to appraise the current level of understanding should examine each exercise and decide whether its results are encouraging or deplorable. Here is an example:

Exercise R11lA presents 9-year-olds, 17-year-olds, and adults with a stanza from an Emily Dickinson poem and asks two questions about its central metaphor. The stanza reads

> Hope is a thing with feathers
> That perches in the soul,
> And sings the tune without the words,
> And never stops at all.[1]

The first question reads: "Hope is made to be like (a) a bird, (b) the soul, (c) an Indian, or I don't know." The answer is obviously a bird, but it was selected by only 47% of all the 9-year-olds and 24% of the 9-year-olds in the "extreme inner city" subgroup. Should one be alarmed that fewer than half of the 9-year-olds could answer such an elementary question? Or is this about what we should expect of fourth graders? Is the disparity between the results for all children and the results for those who attend inner city schools an acceptable condition?

The results for 17-year-olds reveal that 87.5% selected the correct answer. Is this satisfactory or is it somewhat dismaying

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[1]Emily Dickinson, "Hope is a Thing with Feathers," The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1960.

that one 17-year-old in eight (two Black 17-year-olds in five) cannot answer such an elementary question about metaphor?

Here is one more example from this theme:

Exercise R127 presents 17-year-olds and adults with a caustic poem, asks them about the speaker's intentions, and then requires a written defense of the respondent's answer.

Exercise R127

Ages 17, adult
Objective IIB
Time: 6 minutes

Here is a poem about which you are going to be asked two questions. I will read the poem aloud as you read it to yourself. When we have read the poem carefully, I will read you the first question and you are to fill in the oval beside the answer you think best. Then I will read the second question to you and you are to write your answer in the answer space.

Sport

Hunters, hunters
Follow the chase.
I saw the Fox's eyes,
Not in his face
But on it, big with fright
Haste, hunters, haste!

Say, hunters, say
Is it a noble sport?
As rats that bite
Babies in cradles, so
Such rats and men
Take their delight.

Age 17	Age Adult	A. Which of the following do you think the poet is really doing?
49.9%	55.8%	⬭ He is being angry at hunters.
6.3%	5.6%	⬭ He is cheering the hunters on.
19.7%	14.1%	⬭ He is feeling sorry for animals.
20.7%	20.0%	⬭ He is just describing hunters and animals.
2.7%	3.3%	⬭ I don't know.
NR: +	1.2%	B. What are your reasons for choosing your answer to question A?

The most accurate answer is "angry"; 50% of the 17-year-olds and 56% of the adults selected it. However, only 10% of the 17-year-olds and 12% of the adults defended that choice with a well written explanation, while 29% at each age provided adequate defenses and the remainder wrote less than adequate responses. Are these figures encouraging or portentous?

This literature theme should be read along with volumes 5, 6, 7, and 8 of the National Assessment Reading Report. Combining the five themes, there were 124 exercises assessing various literary comprehension skills at the 9-year-old level; at age 13, there were 171; at age 17, there were 145; and for young adults, there were 79. The information gathered by all these items provides baseline data about reading skills which are indispensable for literary comprehension. At the moment the data indicate that people in some socioeconomic groups are less likely to fully comprehend the imaginative language of literature than most people. But there is a good deal more research ahead. For now, we at least have a starting point from which to launch inquiries that may one day tell us precisely which aspects of reading skill are most difficult for what subgroups at which age levels with what effect upon their capacity to enjoy and profit from literary art.

CHAPTER II

THEME 2: RESPONDING TO LITERATURE

The results for all exercises which required verbal or written responses to a specific work appear in this volume of the Literature Report. There were not a great many such exercises for the obvious reason that they are very time consuming; however, the results do provide interesting baseline data as well as some very enjoyable reading.

All responses, whether written or verbal, were analyzed in two ways. First, they were classified according to the response categories detailed by Alan Purves and Victoria Rippere in NCTE Research Report No. 9, Elements of Writing about a Literary Work: A Study of Response to Literature. Once categorized, they were scored holistically on a one to four point scale.

Briefly, the Purves-Rippere categories describe various relationships between the writer of an essay and the work he is writing about. The first category, termed "engagement-involvement," defines personal approaches to the work -- subjective reflections or digressions and general discussions of the respondent's involvement in it.

The second category is termed perception and it encompasses responses which separate respondent from work and attend to the work primarily as an object to be described or functionally analyzed. Essays or verbal comments in this category are usually formalistic or analytic in direction.

Interpretation is the third category and into it fall all responses in which the essay writer attempts to find meanings in the work and generalize about its content and implications.

The fourth major category is called evaluation; it encompasses quality judgments and general reflections on the worth of the work and the value of reading it. When we found that a great many people tended to retell the story or poem literally, we made a separate (fifth) category for retelling; in the Purves-Rippere scheme, this type of essay would be in category II, but it seemed useful to separate formalistic responses from these quite different sorts of perception. We also added a category for maverick responses, many of which were very creative.

Verbal responses were obtained by presenting people with stories or poems and asking them what they most wanted to say about the work, what they especially noticed, and what they thought about it. We recorded their responses, transcribed them, and categorized each statement made during the interview. Since most people expressed different reactions to each question, most produced statements in more than one category.

Results for essays, however, are a different matter. The scorers categorized an essay according to its general thrust; they did not, as with the verbal responses, classify individual statements. Thus, the category results for essay responses

represent percentages of entire essays in a particular category. The two readers of each essay had to decide which of the frames of mind represented by the categories dominated the essay. This turned out to be easier than it sounds, probably because the essays were quite short and written within definite time limits.

The four-point quality scoring system worked as follows: a "one" response was totally inadequate; a "two" was barely adequate, usually consisting of perfunctory, undocumented, usually vague, assertions; a "three" was an adequate response using details in the work accurately to support an assertion about it; and a "four" was a superior response, demonstrating insight, command of details, and sophistication. The report details percentages of people who received adequate or better scores regardless of which category their responses fell into. It also reporduces sample responses ranging from the poorest to the most exciting.

The stimuli for the tape recorded responses consisted of three poems and the story "Sam, Bangs, and Moonshine," by Evaline Ness.[2] Nine-year-olds reacted to the story and two poems; 13-year-olds were given two poems, and the two older age groups responded verbally to a single poem. As one might expect, there were definite changes in the distribution of statements among the categories depending on the stimulus and the age of the respondent. Very few 9-year-olds approached Sam, Bangs, and Moonshine as an object to be analyzed, but a large percentage of them made engagement-involvement and evaluative statements about it. A great many more made formalistic perception responses when confronted with a poem, however. At all ages, about half or more of the people expressed some involvement with the perception category. The proportion of interpretive statements increased with age. On one poem, fewer than one 9-year-old response in ten was interpretive, but almost two-thirds of the statements made by 17-year-olds and adults fell into this category. Evaluative responses (category IV), on the other hand, decreased in number at the higher age levels. More than three 9-year-olds in five made evaluative statements, but at age 17 and at the adult level the proportion was between a third and a half. This is perhaps partly due to the tendency of the 9-year-old to reply "it's pretty good" regardless of the question, but it may also reflect the greater attention older people devoted to interpretive observations.

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[2]Evaline Ness, Sam, Bangs and Moonshine, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966.

TABLE 1. PERCENTAGE OF RESPONSES IN EACH CATEGORY

Literary Work	Age	Category				
		I	II	III	IV	V
"Sam, Bangs, etc."	9	62	2	28	62	43
"If Apples, etc."	9	64	30	19	51	35
"Space Travellers"	9	69	17	9	62	50
"Space Travellers"	13	66	32	32	53	43
"Closing of the Rodeo"	13	53	23	46	51	40
"Closing of the Rodeo"	17	52	30	62	47	27
"Closing of the Rodeo"	Adult	47	13	63	37	30

Adequate or better responses were rare at the younger ages. Twenty-two percent of the 9-year-olds received adequate or better scores for their responses to the story; but the figure dropped to 12% for the poem "If apples were pears" and 6% for the poem "Space Travellers," by James Britton. Percentages were higher for some subgroups--notably the extreme affluent suburb group and children whose parents have more than a high school education. For 13-year-olds, the percentages of adequate responses were 18% for one poem, 15% for the other. Twenty-eight percent of the 17-year-olds' and 37% of the adults' remarks were at least adequate.

Below is a poem used as a stimulus for 13-year-olds, 17-year-olds, and adults. It is followed by graphs indicating the percentages of people in various subgroups who received adequate or better ratings for their responses, and these are followed by sample responses.

The Closing of the Rodeo[3]

The lariat snaps; the cowboy rolls
His pack, and mounts and rides away.
Back to the land the cowboy goes.

Plumes of smoke from the factory sway
In the setting sun. The curtain falls,
A train in the darkness pulls away.

Goodbye, says the rain on the iron roofs.
Goodbye, say the barber poles,
Dark drum the vanishing horses' hooves.

William Jay Smith

[3]William Jay Smith, Celebration at Dark, New York: Farrar and Strauss.

TABLE 2. PERCENTAGES IN EACH CATEGORY (ROUNDED)

Age	I	II	III	IV	V
13	53%	23%	46%	51%	40%
17	52	30	62	47	27
Adult	47	13	63	37	30

EXHIBIT 1.

Thirteen-Year-Olds: Group Percentages Giving Adequate Response

Note: Asterisked numbers indicate that a group's percentage difference from the national percentage is statistically significant.

Seventeen-Year-Olds: Group Percentages Giving Adequate Response

Adults: Group Percentages Giving Adequate Response

SAMPLE RESPONSES

Age 13

1. It was a good poem. It didn't rhyme very much. I thought poems should always rhyme, but this one didn't rhyme very well.

2. It's a good poem about cowboys and how a town burns and what you see after the town burns. About the rain on the roofs and when it leaves and how you don't see it in the summer. About when like its raining outside and in the midsummer you don't hardly see rain in the summer like in the winter.

3. It's a good short poem. It's sad. When it says the closing of the rodeo it gives a sad title to it and when it says goodbye.

4. If this was some hippy writing this, and this had a different meaning, you would think this was a poem of pollution. Plumes of smoke from the factory and the setting sun, the curtain falls like a curtain of pollution. And goodbye says the rain on the iron roofs, that is saying goodbye to pollution.

5. The free feeling, but I like the sentence the curtain fall and I really think it's true because there is so much of a division of the different lives that they give. The cowboy and the hustle and bustle of the city and the cars and trains and that's the only way we know how to travel. The cowboy he rides on a horse he's his own man and he's not tied to anybody. He doesn't worry about society and what will people think if he does a certain thing.

6. I like it because it has alot of meaning to me about pollution. If I was in Congress, I'd have all the cars stopped and all that too, but unfortunately I'm not.

Age 17

1. It's a good poem. It's you know, I guess if I hear a poem or if I can see something when I read it or when I hear it, it's got a lot to do with the way it was said on tape. If I can see something and get a picture in my mind then, I think it's a good poem. I think that's what the author - the poet's motive is to make people see what he's talking about.

2. It seems to me that it had kind of a rhythm pattern to it. That is how I like poems to be. Instead of a set pattern, it should be how the guy likes to write about the poem. Instead

of planning everything - just writing it down.

3. I think it's a very good poem and it has some sort of a romantic atmosphere. My opinion is it's very nice and it makes a person want to analysis it more and think about it.

4. I didn't like it. For one thing I don't like cowboys. It sounds like he is a cowboy in modern times. Plumes of smoke from the factory sway. Sounds like he's riding someplace and there is this big factory where everything used to be where he is riding now. I'm not truly sure if that is what it means or if it has another meaning. Goodbye says the rain on the iron roof - this last paragraph is telling it like it used to be. Goodbye says the barber poles and dark drum the vanishing horses' hooves. It is all gone. They left.

5. I kind of like these kind of poems because it symbolizes some of the trouble, the death of the cities and things like that. I can identify this guy that he likes to be out in the open by himself and he wants to get away from the city and stuff.

6. This man is showing about air pollution or any kind of pollution because he starts off with the cowboy. He rolls his pack and mounts away quiet. He went on to his business. He wasn't really interested in progress, he just went on the way that he did. He wanted to keep the world the way that it was. Later he goes on, the factories smoke in the setting sun and the curtain falls. He tells about how the world is becoming darker because of pollution and how it is ending the world. He finishes off with dark drum the vanishing horse's hooves. I guess he would rather be living now than when the cowboy was living, when the cowboy was living, when there was peace and not so much air pollution. (etc.)

7. As I interpreted the poem, it's making a statement on the closing of an era - The West. It uses the cowboy as an allegory of the old west and the imagery in the poem is the cowboy as he stand in contrast to the smoke of the factories and the train which all signal progress. I believe the noticeable things about the poem was the style. I think it signals something of a contrast or it tries to play out the contrast by using the cowboy and the old west and progress has come and he no longer has a place in society.

8. It says the closing of the rodeo but I think the author is thinking back when cowboys were king and tells kind of how he wishes he could be back there cause of the last verse, goodbye says the rain and goodbye says the barber poles. Things are now complicated and it was better when things were free where the cowboy could just get up and ride away from everything.

Adults (Ages 26-35)

1. It was very descriptive. The author seems to in a short and blunt way seems to describe things in details even though his thoughts aren't - they don't coincide but they do whatever he happens to describe in each little paragraph seems to be vivid. It's short and I like short poems.

2. Probably the thing I noticed most was the way the final stanza contains the vanishing rhythm of goodbye, it's repeated again and again so that you actually get a sense of the vanishing horses' hooves. The sounds that are produced, those of someone riding off in a distance which also with the image of departing the train pulling away, smoke vanishing, things of this sort.

3. It uses some interesting symbols such as rain on the iron roofs I thought was very good use of words. I thought it was a very good poem, expresses quite a lot in just three stanzas. Also things like the setting sun I feel possibly a little trite and also the curtain falls but goodbye says the rain on the roofs and goodbye says the barber poles, etc. was a little interesting. I was trying to think, I forget what that's called having an inanimate object speaking, the literary term for it is bothering me.

4. One of the most interesting things about his poem to me is the dichotomy that is usually set up between the evil, bad city and the beautiful ideally country side is reversed at least by implication the country side or possibly the cowboy's job is seen as dull and hum-drum whereas the city is seen as a place of excitement and light and a place where it's possible to achieve glory. I like this poem. I think the poet accomplishes concisely and well what he sets out to do. The only possible objection that I have is the last line "Dark drum the vanishing horses' hooves" which at the one time seems to be a bit melodramatic for the sense of - whereas the theme is dramatic, the poet I do not think the poet set out to create a dramatic atmosphere throughout the poem rather it's a more mournful sense of loss and the melodramatic last line does not accomplish this and aside from that it's very hard to have vanishing horses which is sort of a secondary situation but which I think is important. "Dark drum the vanishing horses' hooves" at least what I question is whether it is out of context with the rest of the poem which follows sort of Elliot-like realism with vivid images towing to real life, the lariat snaps, the curtain falls, rain on the iron roofs and then suddenly we have all these vanishing horses.

There were four exercises requiring written essays. Two were administered to 13-year-olds, two to 17-year-olds and adults. People at each age level wrote in response to both poems and short stories.

Because we used different categorizing techniques for the essays, the distribution of responses among the categories changed considerably. About 1 essay in 11 was an engagement-involvement response, though for an A. E. Housman poem the proportion was 1 in 33. Regardless of stimulus of age level, there were always very few perception responses--in fact, never more than 3%. Thirteen-year-olds wrote fewer interpretive essays than 17-year-olds or adults. For instance, 29% of their responses to the poem "Space Travellers" were interpretive, whereas 81% of the adult responses to Housman's "Into My Heart" were interpretive. At all ages, however, a poetic stimulus prompted more interpretive essays and far fewer paraphrasings than did the stories. Evaluative compositions were almost as rare as formalistically oriented ones at all ages, but especially at the two oldest age levels. Retellings appeared most frequently at age 13 -- 33% of the poetry responses and 55% of the story essays were mainly paraphrasings -- but they almost disappeared at the higher age levels (see Table 3).

TABLE 3. Percentage of Essays in Each Category

Literary Work	Age	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
"Space Travellers"	13	9	3	29	9	33	11
"Half a Gift"	13	12	-	21	4	55	6
"Snake Dance"	17	9	1	56	5	25	4
"Into My Heart"	17	3	1	86	1	1	3
"Snake Dance"	Adult	8	1	69	2	16	1
"Into My Heart"	Adult	9	1	81	1	3	2

In general, the percentage of acceptable responses was greater on the written exercises than on the taped ones. Twenty-one percent of the 13-year-olds' essays about a poem received scores of 3 or 4, and 24% of their responses to a story were at least adequate. Interestingly, students in the inner city group did very poorly on the poem but performed as well as all 13-year-olds in their response to the story "Half a Gift" by Robert Zachs -- a sensitive portrait of an impoverished inner city family. Their unusual success on this item would seem to support the view that children become more involved in materials they can relate to and that this involvement can often compensate for deficiencies in writing skill.

In response to the story "Snake Dance," by Corey Ford, 44% of the 17-year-olds and 45% of the adults wrote adequate or better essays. There was a 15 point difference between the percentages of males and females writing good essays, the girls having the advantage. At the adult level, there was no sex

difference but there was a major difference between two regional groups: the Southeastern percentage was 17 points below the national figure and the Western percentage was almost 12 points above.

Essays about the Housman poem "Into My Heart" make fascinating reading even when they were not particularly well done. A number of people interpreted the phrase "air that kills" in the opening line. ("Into my heart an air that kills") as a reference to pollution; others used the poem as a forum for their war views, assuming, apparently, that the speaker was a returning Vietnam veteran. Of the several thousand essays written about this poem, nineteen percent of the 17-year-olds' and 28% of the adults' received adequate or superior scores.

Following are two poems, their group result breakdowns, and some of the responses they generated. Theme 2 of the Literature Report includes complete results and many more samples.

Space Travellers

There was a witch, hump-backed and hooded,
Lived by herself in a burnt-out tree.
When storm winds shrieked and the moon was buried
And the dark of the forest was black as black,
She rose in the air like a rocket at sea,
Riding the wind,
Riding the night,
Riding the tempest to the moon and back.

There may be a man with a hump of silver,
Telescope eyes and a telephone ear,
Dials to twist and knobs to twiddle,
Waiting for a night when skies are clear,
To shoot from the scaffold with a blazing track,
Riding the dark,
Riding the cold,
Riding the silence to the moon and back.

EXHIBIT 2.

Thirteen-Year-Olds: Group Percentages of Adequate Essays

Sample Written Responses

1. Did not like because it is childlish and I am not a child

2. This poem explains that there is a witch. A witch who lived in an old broken down house which was in a tree. This witch, in my opinion, is dum, idiotic, and if I wasn't taking this test I would have never read this stupid poem if I was being payed for reading. First of all as an eights grader I do not believe in any of this child's play. A man with telescopic eyes what phony junk I couldn't care less about this dum humbug. I mean for someone to be as creative as this, It's sickening. I mean I understand that writers use alliteration and personification but this is going just a little bit to far.

3. The author is comparing our space-age now with myths a while

ago. Both are referred to as some sort of monster or creature. One is man's invention of the mind, the witch. The other is man's invention put into effect; the spaceship. The witch seems to be more human than the spaceman. One of the differences between the two is that the witch goes out on stormy nights, and the spaceship on clear nights. They are basically the sam (the witch & spaceman).

4. I think this poem is trying to express how man is striving to gain knowledge, represented by the observes in the poem, while mysteries, represented by the witch, still are evident which we still don't quite understand. Even with all our tools, represented by the knobs & dials, there are still things which we have to learn. Man might want to explore other places (planets) while the witch takes it for granted. The witch might live under bad conditions while man is secure but the witch can fly

5. I don't think that it is a good poem. I don't understand it and nothing rimes. Doesn't make any sense.

6. This poem, I basically liked because it put forth a good mood and feeling with the witch in the first part. However, words and cliches such as "humpbacked," "black as black," and "Knobs to twiddle," are not very descriptive they are to "childish". But they do get the point across.

   The comparison between the witch and the lunor rocket, which was excellently described as a "mechanical witch," is very good. It shows both a contrast and a comparison between flight on a broom and flight in the technical sense on a modern spacecraft.

7. There may be a dog with hunk of lead
   with bloodest eyes that are black and red
   With a horse's tail and a cow's feet
   Who eats nothing but lemburger meat
   Waiting to blast off with his rocket ear
   He may not be back for a million years
   Riding through space
   Riding through stars
   Hitchiking in way out space cars.

   I think this poem helps exspand the imagination Children at the ages of 9 and under like to hear weird words.

Following is the second Sample exercise, along with the directions which accompanied it:

Write a composition in which you discuss this poem. We are more interested in what you have to say than in how you say it.

Into my heart an air that kills
From yon far country blows.
What are those blue remembered hills,
What spires, what farms are those?

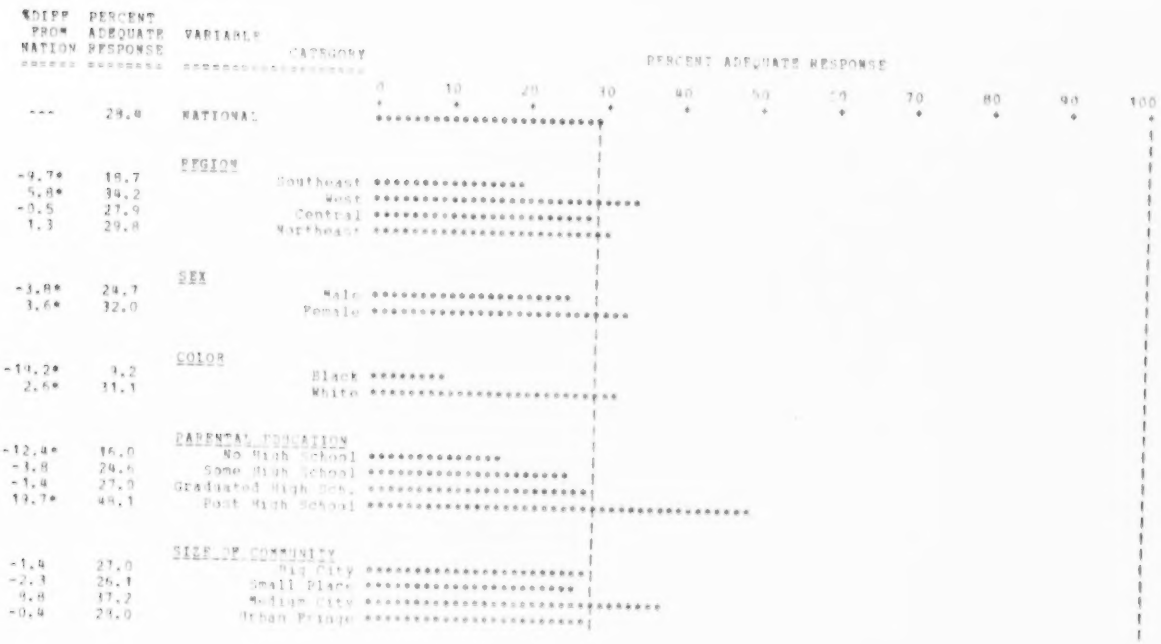
This is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain.
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again.

A. E. Housman, 1890

EXHIBIT 3.

Seventeen-Year-Olds: Group Percentages of Adequate Essays

Adults: Group Percentages of Adequate Essays



Sample Written Responses, Age 17

1. I'm a lover, I suspose you would say, of good poetry. At least what I might think is good poetry. I am at the present involved with poetry in English. I'm not trying to be a great literary critic, yet I can't say I enjoyed the poem opposite this page. I sounded to me very sticky and some how sloppy to me. Maybe it is simply my prejudice concerning certain forms of poetry that allows me to make the preceding statements. I like poetry that is simple yet very beautifully put together and rhymed. I prefer the AABB rhyme to AAAA, and enjoy a relatively simple beat. Like I said before, I am not a critic, yet I really didn't enjoy this.

2. This poem, by A. E. Housman, is a perfect example of well constructed poetry. The poem cosists of two rhymed quatrain. In the first quatrain the rhyme scheme is as follows: ABAB, in the second it is CDCD.

   Rhyme is not employed in a poem just for sound, but in order to express some idea by the poet. With rhyme, a poet can link words that create a unique meaning vital to his poem.

The meter of the poem is eambic tetrameter. This particular meter is often used by poets in communicating themes of live or grief. Meter is another rheteric device used by the poet in communicating his idea.

3. Housman's poem, like all poetry, has two levels the literal and the symbolic. The literal level refers to what is said on the surface, or the meaning taken directly from reading it. The symbolic level level means the idea he is trying to communicate by the hidden meaning of the words, and rhetric devices combined.

   All this is a part of Housman's poem, and a part of all other poetry.

4. They are saying, or what I think is the person lived in the country, and has lost his land, and will never be able to see it again. That when he sees the air, it kills him to look at it. He is saying to himself what hills, and farms are those, because he can still remember this when he once was there. He sees it shining plain, with no one there, therefore it stands, shining & plain, he remembers when he rode the highways down into the country & he thinks back once upon a time that he was there.

5. This guy in the poem is supposedly in a strange land. He longs to go back home where he feels he would be much happier. It's the same old story - "I got dem ol' homesick blues again, mama and I feel like dying..."

   Then again, this poem could have a deeper theme. Perhaps the person longs to return to another previous time space in his own life. Perhaps he was some poor guy who made it rich and went to the big city etc., but now he longs to go back to where he "belongs."

6. In this poem Housman makes plain the pain that can come from shattered dreams and loss of what made a person contented. A person who has not felt joy or contentment is not happy, but he doesn't know exactly what he is missing. One who has experienced that feeling of contentment and loses it loses everything. It is not the lack of joy which causes the pain, it is the remembrance of things which are no longer possible to have. The poet calls this memory of blue hills and farms a cold wind that kills. In a way memory is a cold wind that kills the spirit of a man who has lost.

7. It's about something everyone knows about today, pollution. Not just the air we breath, but the water. A. E. Housman is very forunate, because he can remember not haveing

pollution. Most young kids can't! They remember dirty water, factories, air you can't even see through. Farms have trouble with the pollution of the water. How can they grow health food if the water and air is polluted?! He also says he thinks that from now on this is the way its gonna be. I don't think so.

8. I don't like the way its written that is the way everything rhymes so perfectly - hills-kills; blows-those; content-went; plain-again. It sort of seems fake & plaster. It is nice thougn and I can't really knock it. By its definite rhythm and everything it is impossible to read it straight, I keep on saying it in spurts, like saying a limerick, than a poem. It sounds like something Bullwinkle the Moose reads on his show or the Rocky show. It doesn't seem strange that I never heard of A. E. Housman (1890) because the poem is so cheaply wrote. He probably published a volume of his works that all sound the same.

9. You say that you are more interested in what we have to say, than how we say. Is this always true, or is it ever true this time. I don't know whether I can belief you or not. Or ever trust you or not!

10. It seems to be talking about someone whose life is soon to end. He or she is looking back on life at the beautiful things they've seen.

P.S. This country is suppose to be keeping tabs on one out of every eight people in the U.S. - I hope this test has nothing to do with it - I wouldn't appreciate being spied upon.

Thank you.

Sample Adult Written Responses

1. The poem is very good for those people who like poetry for the romane reasons. I am a person when it comes to love, I tell someone or they know in the way I act around them.

2. This is sad to me; a man speaking of maybe home where he can no longer visit. He remembers and it is painful because it is lost to him. I don't like it.

3. The poem is like my childhood happy care free wonderful. But we can never go back, because we are grown up and have responsibility.

4. This is a very nice poem it reminds me of the problems of

today. The war, the strikes and the crime all of the happy days of the United States and other countries are gone. This land needs peace, love and understanding so that each sister and brother can understand one another.

5. America's ecology is in danger. The air we breathe is being polluted by factory smoke and fumes from car exhausts. We are no longer able to drive and view the wondorous mountain tops because of the smog created by man's scientific inventions.

   The question is, "Should we have modern inventions at the price of human sacrifice?" I say No. Our young people are discontented because man has forgotten the first law, self-presevation. We should plan our advancement so that the survival of all men is number one.

   Not only that we should consider the natural resources given to us as fortunes that cannot be replaced. After all, man cannot replace or rebuild what nature has given us free of charge.

6. This poem makes me think of all the time I could have put to better use especially in my school years. As I look back on my life, I can see where I should have taken more interest in community and school activities, and learned more about the history of the town, so I could understand more of why the people have so many pro's and con's on the advancement of education and business opportunities. I honestly wish that there were some way I could go back and do it over again but as the poem states those are happy highways where I once was and can never go again. I hope that I can inspire my children to make the best of all their years and I'm trying harder to take more interest in things today especially those which will help in education for my children.

7. This is a poem written to communicate sadness for a time past in the author's life - childhood, young adulthood -- or whatever.

   In any case, the author recalls these times as (1) happy (happy highway, shining, content) and (2) irrevocably and sadly gone ("lost", cannot come again", "from yon fair country").

   As a result, he is now wistful and sad - in fact, he describes the memory as an "air that kills."

   Most likely it is written by an elderly man who lives with only his memories -- although possibly it could have been

written by a depressed, young adult wishing he had his childhood innocence (hills, farm, etc.) back and could escape the burdens of responsibile adulthood.

8. Houseman here muses on the passage of time - likening his temporal separation from prior events and emotions to the physical distance between a traveler and a well-loved place. The past has been transformed by memory - what in experience was pleasant, now in remembrance is painful "an air that kills". This statement of the past's pleasantness, however, is countered by the indistinctness of the memories - "blue remembered" plus no detail re "spires" and "farms". As a whole, these stanzas evoke a sense of the mixture of pain and pleasure memory affords.

9. I am not dead but fighting with pollution everyday. I know that the public must co-operate in an all out effort to combat this pestilence.

   It is sad when the public feels secure in leaving the situation as is, in favor of fast living and short breath.

   I remember when the skies were azure and the air was pleasantly fragrant - tainted only now and then by burning garbage, dead animals or foul language.

10. World War. That's All.

CHAPTER III

THEME 3: RECOGNIZING LITERARY WORKS AND CHARACTERS

The third theme includes most of the exercises written to satisfy the first of the three major literature objectives: "Read literature of excellence." Five types of exercises assessed different kinds of recognition: the first presented the student with a picture from a well-known nursery rhyme, story, or poem and asked him what work it illustrated; the second consisted of parodies of famous poems ("The Village Blacksmith," "The Charge of the Light Brigade," and "Sea Fever," for instance) and instructions to identify the source of the parody; the third type of exercise presented the respondent with an allusion to some literary work or figure and asked for identification of the allusion; the fourth presented people with a disguised myth or story pattern and asked for identification of its source; and the fifth consisted of straightforward questions about specific works and figures.

Needless to say, there are so many important literary works and characters in Western literature alone that it would be impossible to assess recognition of many. Therefore, the exercises involve a few selected names and works from folk literature, a few from Greek and Roman mythology, several from the Bible and from standard literary works often found on curriculum lists. Hopefully, data based on these few items will give us some idea of the extent to which people are familiar with a much broader range of works and characters.

The results indicate that, in general, there was a steady increase from age to age in the percentage of people who recognized works and characters. For instance, 45% of the 9-year-olds recognized an illustration of the Mad Hatter's Tea Party from Alice in Wonderland; at age 13, the percentage was 72%, and at age 17, it was 78%. Two-thirds of the 13-year-olds recognized an allusion to Adam, but at age 17 the proportion was four-fifths.

Some figures or works were not familiar to many people at any age level. Only 8% of the 13-year-olds recognized Don Quixote, for instance; at ages 17 and adult the figure was slightly over 20%. Only half the teenagers and adults recognized a parody of "The Charge of the Light Brigade," and only 54% connected David with the Psalms. Though half of the 9-year-olds said they had heard of Cupid, only 28% were able to give an acceptable description of him. The story of Job went unrecognized by many 13- and 17-year-olds, as the exercise on the following page illustrates:

Exercise R334

Old Petersen had had a good life, a good farm--the richest in the country, a happy family, a nice tidy income. Even so, he wasn't proud, just thankful. Then the locusts came and ate his wheat, someone poisoned his wells, and to cap it off, his children died of diphtheria. What had happened, Petersen wondered. What had he done? It was enough to make a man lose his faith.

Which one of these stories do you think the passage is based on?

Age 13	Age 17	
15.3%	35.5%	● Job
7.7	8.0	○ Exodus
6.2	5.6	○ Barabbas
42.1	27.6	○ The Fall of Man
28.5	23.1	○ I don't know.
.2	.2	○ No response

EXHIBIT 4.

Thirteen-Year-Olds: Group Percentage Giving Correct Response

%DIFF FROM NATION	PERCENT CORRECT RESPONSE	VARIABLE CATEGORY	PERCENT CORRECT RESPONSE 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100
---	15.3	NATIONAL	•••••••••••••
		REGION	
2.9	18.2	Southeast	•••••••••••••••
-4.1*	11.1	West	••••••••••
2.7	17.9	Central	•••••••••••••••
-2.2	13.1	Northeast	••••••••••••
		SEX	
-0.6	14.7	Male	•••••••••••••
0.6	15.8	Female	••••••••••••••
		COLOR	
-3.7	11.5	Black	••••••••••
0.4	15.6	White	••••••••••••••
		PARENTAL EDUCATION	
0.6	15.8	No High School	••••••••••••••
-2.4	12.9	Some High School	••••••••••••
0.7	16.0	Graduated High Sch.	••••••••••••••
1.8	17.1	Post High School	•••••••••••••••
		SIZE-AND-TYPE OF COMMUNITY	
-8.5*	6.7	Extreme Inner City	••••••
12.9	28.2	Extreme Rural	••••••••••••••••••••••••••
0.7	15.9	Small City	••••••••••••••
1.7	17.0	Medium City	•••••••••••••••
-1.6	13.7	Rest Of Big City	••••••••••••
-3.0	12.3	Suburban Fringe	••••••••••••
-3.5	11.8	Extreme Aff Suburb	••••••••••

Seventeen-Year-Olds: Group Percentage Giving Correct Response

On the other hand, a good many exercises seemed to be relatively easy, especially for the older participants. More than three quarters of the teenagers and adults recognized Sherlock Holmes from a silhouette profile; 87% of the 17-year-olds identified Moby Dick (probably because it is often taught in high school); more than 90% of the 17-year-olds and adults correctly identified allusions to Samson, Noah, and Tom Sawyer.

The group results in this theme are particularly interesting since they are far less stable on some exercises than they are for most. On a typical literature assessment exercise, one region tends to dominate through the three lower age levels, females show a consistent advantage across ages, while Blacks, certain extreme STOC groups, and the lower parental education groups tend to register percentages far below the national level. But on some of the exercises in this theme the customary patterns disappeared. Notice exercise R320, for instance, a parody of Longfellow's "Village Blacksmith": at age 13 there was no Southeastern deficit, or Black-White difference, but at age 17, the Southeastern percentage was 8 points, the Black percentage 19 points, below the national figure. The percentage of inner city 9-year-olds who responded correctly to the Alice in Wonderland illustration mentioned above was 24 points below the national figure and 45 points lower than the figure posted by the affluent

suburb group; but at age 13, there was no significant difference between the performance of inner city children and all 13-year-olds. It is possible that these radical changes in performance reflect somewhat the tumult in the English curriculum over the last four or five years. Seventh and eighth graders today are being exposed to materials that differ considerably from those they would have encountered four years ago. But there are undoubtedly other factors involved in these atypical results and careful analysis may tell us even more about their implications.

In general, the Central region performed best at the two lower age levels; 9-year-olds in this group were particularly good at describing Paul Bunyan (their percentage of success was 13 points above the national figure). The Northeast region tended to do slightly better than the Central and Western regions at the two older age levels. Regardless of age, the Southeastern group was lowest; however, relative to its usual performance, the Southeastern region did particularly well in recognition of Biblical figures at ages 9 and 13.

At each age level, females demonstrated a slight advantage over all the exercises taken together. However, on certain exercises there were very large differences between male and female performance. Nine percent more 9-year-old girls than boys recognized an illustration from Winnie the Pooh, for instance, and their advantage on Alice in Wonderland was even larger (10%). But on Moby Dick the 17-year-old males demonstrated a 12 point superiority and on Sherlock Holmes an 8 point advantage. In fact, our results over all the ages indicate a male advantage for masculine figures such as Robin Hood, Paul Bunyan, Daniel Boone, Samson, and John Henry, along with better than average recognition of adventurous works such as Moby Dick, Treasure Island, and Gulliver's Travels. Females outperform males on poems, nursery rhymes, and works such as Charlotte's Web, Alice in Wonderland, and Winnie the Pooh. The sexes seem to have about equal success in recognizing Biblical figures.

Relative to their usually subnational performance, Blacks and people in the extreme inner city category did unusually well in recognizing characters like Tom Sawyer, Achilles, and John Henry but quite poorly on works such as Alice in Wonderland, The Wizard of Oz, Winnie the Pooh or Charlotte's Web. At all four age levels, the extreme affluent suburb group consistently performed above the national level, convincingly indicating that they are more familiar with literature than people in the other groups.

Besides providing some information about the relative familiarity of various groups of people with certain works and characters, the exercises in this theme, like those in theme 2, offer some entertaining reading. Since guesses can often tell us as much as correct answers, we are including in the report some often amusing, always revealing responses to some of our questions. On the following page are some samples:

1. Have you ever heard of Moses?
Can you tell me something about him?

He opened the sea and when the Russians were coming he close it - the Jews got through and the rest died.

He was found in the river bank when he was a baby. He was a Baptist.

Moses and the ark - something like that.

2. Have you ever heard of Thor?
Can you tell me something about him?

He was a great man who lived long ago. He wanted to rule the world but he always got held back. He never got to win the world.

I saw his name once in the Bible.

Great sports man, likes to play football, think he was from Oklahoma.

3. Have you ever heard of Paul Bunyan?
Can you tell me something about him?

He built the Rocky Mountains - had a blue ox named Babe. He had a big saw mill - cut down trees. He was about 100 feet tall. Lots of big stories about him.

He's the guy that told everybody the British were coming.

It just don't pop into my head at this time, I guess.

4. Have you ever heard of the Ugly Duckling?
Can you tell me something about him?

Well, there's a commercial about it from Kroger stocking. It goes, "Ugly Ducklings

- wow! wow! wow! For the prettiest legs in town sold only at Krogers for $1.99."

When he was born he looked ugly and then started fooling around and acting silly so they just let him go and he went out and found a mother that could adopt him.

5. Have you ever heard of Eve?
Can you tell me something about her?

She lived off fruits. She married Adam.

She was the first lady of the world - the first girl.

He lived in the garden of Eden. He had a wife but can't remember her name.

She's on Ironside. She's like a police lady.

Christmas Eve.

6. Have you ever heard of Achilles?
Can you tell me something about him?

He was very strong, and like there was this war, not a war but a fight like, and the other guy lost. These people in a castle shot arrows at him. One guy hit him in the heel and it killed him.

He was a writer, I think.

He's a cartoon. Rides around in a broken-down car.

They're little salt water fish not longer than 10 inches. They're like eels; they're scavengers.

7. Have you ever heard of an ogre?
Can you tell me something about him?

He's a man who don't like little girls.

You make butter in it.

It's sort of like cottage cheese and
you eat it.

CHAPTER IV

THEME 4: A SURVEY OF READING HABITS

Theme 4 contains two kinds of exercises. The first kind was designed to determine attitudes toward literature and the second kind to discover what types of literature individuals read. The most interesting highlights of the theme rest primarily in the national, rather than group, results for the various exercises. These results indicate not only that a great majority of Americans read but that the majority feels it is important to read and to teach literature in every school.

In addition to the attitude question discussed at the beginning of this paper, 17-year-olds and young adults were also asked if they think that reading great literature is of any value. Only 10% of the 17-year-olds and 8% of the adults reported that they thought reading great literature was not of any value. Among both groups, about four out of five individuals (79% for 17-year-olds, 83% for adults) reported they felt that reading great literature was valuable, and more than three out of five (62% in both groups) listed at least one reason why they felt this way. Among 17-year-olds, 25% reported that they felt reading great literature helps us to understand history, other cultures, and our society; 20% felt that it exposes us to other points of view; 10% indicated that it leads to greater self-awareness; 7% said that it teaches us to think, 13% that it builds vocabulary; and 8% reported that reading great literature is fun. Among adults, 29% reported that it helps us to understand history, other cultures, and our society; 13% wrote that it exposes us to other points of view, 12% that it leads to greater awareness; 13% felt that it teaches us to think; 10% said that it builds vocabulary; and 9%, that it is simply fun to read. More than one out of five individuals in both groups listed two or more values they felt could be gained from reading great literature.

After reporting sentiments such as these, what do Americans say they actually read? In Exercise R410, 13-year-olds, 17-year-olds, and young adults were asked if they read long stories or novels, short stories, biographies or autobiographies, plays, poems that tell a story (i.e., epic or narrative poems), other poetry, essays, and books of literary history or criticism. If they replied affirmatively, they were asked to give titles. Nationally, 98% of the 13-year-olds reported that they read on their own -- that is, apart from any school assignment--at least one of the eight types of literature; 95% of the 17-year-olds and 89% of the adults made the same report.

The percentages remained high even when the respondents were asked to name the titles of the works they reported they had read. Among 13-year-olds, 86% remembered titles; among 17-year-olds, the figure was 87% and among adults, 76%. There were

significant variations from these figures among the subgroups, especially at the 17-year-old and adult levels, but in no subgroup was the figure for those remembering titles below 60%.

Although the proportions reporting titles in a wide variety of categories were not large, the figures indicate that Americans do read a number of types of literature. Among 13-year-olds, 22% named titles in only one of the eight categories; 26% named titles in two categories, 20% named titles in three categories, and 18% named titles in four or more categories. Among 17-year-olds and adults, the figures were similar, but almost one in four (24%) of the 17-year-olds and 22% of the adults named titles in four or more categories.

The parts of Exercise R410 concerned with novels and with poems are particularly interesting, since these are the two types of literature most stressed in the traditional English curriculum. Seventy-two percent of the 13-year-olds reported that they read novels or long stories on their own; 79% of the 17-year-olds and 76% of the adults made the same claim. The percentage decreased somewhat when it came to specific titles, but it still represented a majority of each group. Among 13-year-olds, 54% remembered titles; 69% of the 17-year-olds and 64% of the adults also reported titles.

The proportions at each age level that reported reading poems are smaller than the proportions for novels, but the figures still indicate a great interest in poetry nationally. More than 46% of the 13-year-olds reported that they read poetry on their own; 43% of the 17-year-olds and 30% of the adults reported that they did so. The proportions giving titles are smaller but still represent a sizable number of individuals. At age 13, 24% gave titles; at 17, 25%; and among adults, 18%.

The group results of the exercises reported in theme four tend to support some observations made by experts in education while refining or changing others. For instance, the data seem to bear out the common feeling among teachers that girls are more likely to be interested in reading than boys. They also seem to indicate that girls are more likely to be interested in poetry and novels than boys are. On the other hand, males are apparently more interested than females in biographies and other nonfiction. Another common belief that the results appear to support is that children whose parents have more than a high school education read more than those whose parents never went beyond high school or never finished. What perhaps was not realized before is that the influence of parental education on reading habits apparently increases as the age of the children increases.

The increase is particularly noticeable at the extremes of the educational continuum, among individuals whose parents did not attend high school, and among individuals who had at least one parent with post high school training. For instance, the median percentage of readers in the no high school subgroup was never as high as the national median percentage at any age level.

On the other hand, the percentage for the post high school subgroup was always above the nation's. At age 9, this subgroup's percentage was 3.9 points above the national figure, at age 13, it was 4.4 points above, at age 17, 5.9 points above, and at the adult level, 12.4 points above the national median. The kinds of exercises that noticeably larger than usual proportions of the post high school subgroups responded to generally dealt with fiction, biography, and general involvement with reading (such as reading books twice or articulating acceptable reasons for reading).

The results for Blacks vary with age. At age 9, their median percentage was one point above the national median for the 11 exercises they answered. At age 13, this percentage was 3.6 points below the national median, at age 17, it was 4.7 points below, and at the adult level it was 7.5 points below. The number of exercises on which the percentage of Blacks responding was greater than the national percentage also decreased with each succeeding age level. There is some evidence that this change in reading habits may be especially abrupt between the 17-year-old and the adult levels. At each of the three lower age levels, there were results for at least one exercise on which the proportion of Blacks responding was 10 or more percentage points above the national figure. In fact, at age 13, the results of two exercises were 21 points above the national figure. At the adult level, however, no results appeared above the national figure.

The survey questions on which Blacks responded in larger than usual proportions when compared with their performance on all exercises tended to be those that deal with poetry or plays. The items to which Blacks responded in smaller than usual proportions were questions about fiction or involvement with reading (such as value judgments or reading a book more than once).

Where are the readers? Apparently, in all parts of the country, for at the three lower age levels no one regional group dominated the overall results. At the adult level, however, the Northeast and West turned in consistently higher than national percentages and the Southeast figure was always below the nation's.

As one might expect, the heavy readers are urban and affluent and those who read least tend to be in the rural areas and the inner city, regardless of age.

The assessment provided a good deal more information about reading habits than can be summarized here. Those who are interested in more details should consult Theme 4 of the Literature Report.

Because each of the theme volumes presents a different kind of data, it is difficult to combine the various theme percentages to arrive at a useful summary statistic. Nonetheless, the previous discussion does reveal some general patterns.

The Southeastern regional group, for instance, usually did not record percentages as great as the nation's, regardless of which age level or theme one refers to. The same situation appeared with regard to Blacks, the two lower parental education groups, and the inner city size and type of community group.

Other groups consistently registered percentages that were higher than the nation's--most notably females, the highest parental education group, Whites, and the affluent suburb group.

One explanation of the disparities in group results might be that the traditional English curriculum (which was the source of Literature assessment materials) has until recently, tended to ignore minority literatures, increasing the probability that children of the wealthy and well-educated would be better attuned than other children to their culture's major artworks. Though this explanation may account for some of the group differences, it is inadequate to account for most of them. The data from both the Literature and Reading assessments indicate that the same groups register lower than national percentages of success, regardless of the type of reading stimulus used or the reading skill being measured. Fortunately, there is also evidence to suggest that these groups occasionally overcome their reading disadvantage on certain kinds of exercises.

As a matter of course, the National Assessment of Educational Progress will continue to gather more information about the extent of these apparent disadvantages and the sorts of reading tasks that enable poeple to overcome them. Hopefully, such information will assist groups such as the National Council of Teachers of English in recognizing nationwide problems in English education and working toward their solutions.